

# **Final Report on the Linkages to Learning Program and Evaluation at Broad Acres Elementary School**

December 2, 1999

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This project was funded by a U.S. Department of Education grant (Award #H237F0014). The authors of this report gratefully acknowledge the support and assistance of the following people: the staff of the Linkages to Learning program at Broad Acres Elementary School; the staff at the experimental and control schools, particularly the principals; the Linkages Resource Team; the Linkages partner agencies, including Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, MCPS, CPC Health, Inc., and the Amigo Program; Kim Nguyen; Ruth Friedman; Judy Card; the research assistants; Sheri Meisel; John & Margot Richters; and the staff of the MCPS Department of Educational Accountability. A special thanks to the parents, children and teachers at both schools for the time they spent helping us understand their needs and the impact of Linkages to Learning.

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## **Executive Summary**

For the past four years, through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the University of Maryland has funded a school-based mental health and social service program. This initiative, Linkages to Learning at Broad Acres Elementary School, was a collaborative effort that involved the Montgomery County Public Schools, the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, and several private agencies. The grant from the U.S. Department of Education funded direct services to low income children and their families and an evaluation of the impact of Linkages to Learning program.

Broad Acres Elementary School serves a very diverse community. The parents of the approximately 500 children in grades K-5 come from more than 40 different countries and speak 10 different languages. Most immigrant families come from the Caribbean, Africa, Central America, and Southeast Asia. About 90% of the students at Broad Acres qualify for free and reduced meals.

Since the spring of 1996, the Linkages to Learning program at Broad Acres has provided a range of mental health, social services, and education services to scores of families and hundreds of children. A health center funded by the Robert Wood Johnson foundation was added to the Linkages program during the second year of operation and complements the other services. Children and families during the past three years have participated in individual and group therapy, adult education, recreation activities, and tutoring.

Researchers at the University of Maryland have assessed children and families participating in the Linkages to Learning program at Broad Acres and a comparison group of children and families at another elementary school. Although differences existed between the communities served by the two schools, there were several positive outcomes for 119 children and 69 parents tracked over three years and served by the Linkages to Learning (LTL) Program. Among other things, parents of children in LTL reported significant decreases in their children's negative behavior over time. A related finding was that while children at the comparison school showed an increase in negative behaviors over time, similar gains which might be expected among children at-risk in the Linkages school, did not occur. Other outcomes such as a decrease in emotional distress by the children at LTL and improved parenting practices among parents receiving services occurred.